

THIS MONTH

Nvidia has spent quite a while lagging behind its rival ATI, but it's now poised to take back the lead with its GeForce 8800 range of graphics chip. As well as being the first range to support Microsoft's DirectX 10, which will be an important part of Windows Vista and future games development, it's a complete rethink of the traditional graphics architecture. Designed to be flexible, so that processing power is available where needed, it blasted through all our benchmarks. You'll find our review of Foxconn's 8800 GTX on page 41.

Canon's EOS 350D showed that digital SLR cameras can give great results and be affordable. This month we have the eagerly awaited update: the EOS 400D. With a few tweaks and general improvements, it already looks like the serious photographer's camera of the year. Our full review is on page 29.

Finally, we have a bit of a novelty product: Viewsonic's ViewDock VX1945wm. This is the first monitor we've seen to include a built-in iPod dock. Our review on page 26 lets you know if it's a brilliant addition to the iPod world or, perhaps, a product too far.

Don't forget to come back next month, as we'll be reviewing Windows Vista and Office 2007.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor



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HI-GRADE

Ultis Tachyon QX6700

★★★★

£2,183 inc VAT

This is the first PC we've seen with an Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6700 processor, which we reviewed in *What's New*, January 2007. We've been impressed by the speed of Intel's dual-core processors, but the quad-core QX6700 is phenomenally quick in Windows applications.

The QX6700 processor is paired with 2GB of RAM, and it made short work of our benchmarks. The Tachyon's score of 499 in our video-encoding test is the fastest we've seen and is five times as fast as our reference PC.

Only applications that are written to take advantage of multiple cores will see such dramatic performance, though. Although the Tachyon tore through our image-editing test, this task is more dependent on the amount of memory available, and the Tachyon's result isn't dramatically better than we've seen from fast Core 2 Duo systems. Still, this is the fastest PC we've seen and will have no trouble handling demanding tasks for some time to come.

The Tachyon has a GeForce 7950 GX2 graphics card with 1GB of onboard memory. It produced stunning speeds in our 3D graphics benchmarks, breezing through our Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 tests with frame rates of 144fps and 58fps respectively. We upped the detail settings in Doom 3 to Ultra Quality and increased the anti-aliasing from 4x to 16x. These settings would bring other PCs to their knees, but the Tachyon still managed a playable frame rate of 29fps, making it great for gamers.

The Tachyon's Intel motherboard supports ATI's CrossFire dual graphics card technology instead of Nvidia's SLI. In the unlikely event that you need more 3D power, you'll have to buy a pair of new ATI cards rather than just adding another GeForce 7950 GX2.

This month What's New Contents



PC Systems	page 10
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Hi-Grade Ultis Tachyon QX6700	★★★★
Mesh Elite E6600 Express	★★★★★
Mesh Viva 940 Pro	★★★★★

Notebooks	page 16
Asus F3F-AP010H	★★★★★
Dell Inspiron 9400	★★★★★
PC Nextday Zoostorm 55-7701	★★★★★
Rock Pegasus T12	★★★
Samsung Q35 Red	★★★★★
Zepto Znote 6015WD	★★★★★



Handhelds	page 22
Fujitsu-Siemens Loox T830	★★★
Navman iCN 720	★★★★★
Nokia E50	★★★★★
Nokia E61	★★★★★
Sony Ericsson K800i	★★★★★
T-Mobile Vario II	★★★★★

Printers	page 24
Canon PIXMA iP4300	★★★★★
Canon PIXMA MP160	★★★★★
Dell Multifunction Colour Laser Printer 3115cn	★★★★★
Dell Multifunction Laser Printer 1815dn	★★★★★
Epson AcuLaser C1100	★★★★★
Epson PictureMate 240	★★★★★
Samsung ML-2510	★★★★★



Displays	page 26
Acer AL1751	★★★★★
Dell 3400MP	★★★★★
HP LP2065	★★★★★
Iiyama X486S 19"	★★★★★
LG 32LC2D	★★★★★
Panasonic PT-AE900E	★★★★★
Samsung 215TW	★★★★★
Viewsonic ViewDock VX1945wm	★★★★

Photography	page 28
Canon EOS 400D	★★★★★
Epson Perfection 2580 Photo	★★★★★
Fujifilm FinePix F20 Zoom	★★★★★
Nikon Coolpix L4	★★★★
Nikon Coolpix L5	★★★★
Olympus FE-200	★
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ50	★★★★★
Sony Cyber-shot DSC-W30	★★★★★
Sony DSC-T30	★★★★★



This computer has a 500GB hard disk, providing plenty of space for movies and music. Windows itself resides on a fast 10,000rpm, 150GB Raptor hard disk that helps to speed up virtual memory performance, but also contributes to the Tachyon's high price. If you ever need more space, the case has two empty 3½" drive bays, and the motherboard supports RAID 0, 1 and 5 arrays. This computer has a memory card reader, floppy drive and, unusually, two 18X DVD writers.

The Tachyon is an expensive PC, and it doesn't come with a monitor or speakers. If you don't mind paying a further £273, Hi-Grade can supply a 19" Sony LCD screen and a set of 7.1-channel Creative speakers. The supplied keyboard feels too spongy for extended use, but at least the

included two-button optical mouse is comfortable. Although the computer's blistering video-encoding speeds and two FireWire ports make it ideal for video editing, it doesn't come with suitable software. There is

a copy of OpenOffice included for office work, but this is freely downloadable anyway.

This computer's amazing processing and graphics power helps it fly through the toughest benchmark programs around. It's a fantastic choice if you want the best possible performance and money is no object, but it is hugely expensive. All but the most fanatical (and rich) users would find a more affordable Core 2 Duo or Athlon 5000+ system fast enough, and much better value.

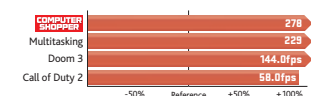
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Incredibly fast in 2D and 3D
- ✓ Plenty of ports and storage
- ✗ Expensive; no monitor or speakers

DESKTOP PC 2.66GHz Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6700, 2GB RAM, 150GB and 500GB hard disks, 1GB Nvidia GeForce 7950 GX2, two DVD+/-RW +/- DL drives
SUPPLIER Hi-Grade 020 8532 6111
DETAILS www.higrade.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



PC SYSTEMS

FAQ

Q My USB2 devices seem to be operating very slowly. How can I speed them up?

A If any USB1.1 device is on the same bus as a USB2 device, the USB2 device will slow down to USB1.1 speeds. If you have any USB1.1 devices plugged into your PC, try disconnecting them or plugging them into a different USB port. If this doesn't help, you may need to check in your BIOS settings that your USB ports are set to operate in USB Hi-Speed mode. Refer to your computer or motherboard's manual if you aren't sure how. If you're using a USB hub, check that it's plugged into a power supply if necessary, and that its ports are USB2 Hi-Speed.

Even though USB2 is rated at a speedy 480Mbit/s, only USB2 Hi-Speed devices will operate this quickly. USB2 Full-Speed devices run at only 12Mbit/s. Check the packaging or documentation for the product to confirm its type.

Alan Lu

PC systems and storage expert

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Video page 32

Canon HV10	★★★★★
Canon MV960	★★★★★
Freecom DV8-T USB Stick	★★★★★
Humax Duovisio PVR-9200T	★★★★★
Pinnacle PCTV Dual DVB-T Diversity Stick	★★★★★
Sling Media Slingbox	★★★★★

Audio page 34

Logitech AudioStation	★★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★★
Logitech Z-10 Interactive Speaker System	★★★★★
Logitech Z-5450	★★★★★
M-Audio Black Box Reloaded	★★★★★
M-Audio Podcast Factory	★★★★★
Philips SLA5520	★★★★★
Samson C01U	★★★★★
Sandisk Sansa e260	★★★★★

Networks page 36

Devolo DLAN 200 AVdesk Starter Kit	★★★★★
D-Link RangeBooster N 650 Router	★★★★★
Netgear Powerline HD Ethernet Adapter	★★★★★
Simply Automate Domino Starter Kit	★★★★★
Thompson SpeedTouch 585 v6	★★★★★
T-Mobile Web 'n' walk professional	★★★★★

Storage page 38

Buffalo LinkStation Pro 250GB	★★★★★
Formac Disk Mini 120GB	★★★★★
Hitachi Deskstar T7K250	★★★★★
HDT722525DLAT80	★★★★★
Hitachi Travelstar 5K160 160GB	★★★★★
Samsung SpinPoint T133 HD401LJ	★★★★★
Seagate 160GB Portable External Hard Drive	★★★★★
Western Digital 500GB My Book Pro Edition	★★★★★
Western Digital Passport 120GB	★★★★★

Components page 40

Antec P150	★★★★★
Asus Vintage V2-AH2	★★★★★
ECS GeForce 6100SM-M	★★★★★
Foxconn GeForce 8800 GTX	★★★★★
Foxconn GeForce 7950GT	★★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo E6700	★★★★★
Leadtek PX7900 GS TDH	★★★★★
MSI P965 Platinum	★★★★★
PowerColor X1950 Pro	★★★★★

Software & Games page 44

3AM Labs LogMeIn	★★★★★
3AM Labs LogMeIn Hamachi	★★★★★
Ableton Live 6	★★★★★
Adobe Dreamweaver 8	★★★★★
Avanquest RadioTracker 2	★★★★★
Cloudmark Desktop for Outlook	★★★★★
EA Battlefield 2142	★★★★★
Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2006	★★★★★
Magix Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL	★★★★★
Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2007	★★★★★
Microsoft Windows Live Messenger 8.0	★★★★★
Microsoft Works Suite 2006	★★★★★
Mozilla Firefox 2	★★★★★
Parallels Desktop for Mac	★★★★★
QuarkXPress 7	★★★★★
Roxio Easy Media Creator 9 Suite	★★★★★
Sony Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6	★★★★★
Pinnacle Studio 10 Plus Titanium Edition	★★★★★
Sega Medieval 2: Total War	★★★★★
Symantec Norton Ghost 10	★★★★★
THQ Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War - Dark Crusade	★★★★★
Vivendi F.E.A.R. Extraction Point	★★★★★

BYTE SIZE

Five Girls

★★★
£10 inc VAT



Strange things are afoot at St Mark's School for Girls. Why are there only five students? Do they all have mystical powers? What is the dark secret that Father Drake (Ron Perlman) is hiding? And will the camera stop lingering on the teenage girls long enough for the plot to make sense?

There's a decent film lurking inside *Five Girls*; it's imaginative and shot with style, and it copes well with its obvious budget limitations. But the script is incoherent, the tone uneven and the acting atrocious, even from the normally reliable Perlman. It's not helped by a soundtrack of inappropriate songs picked seemingly at random. It includes a trailer and a lengthy making-of feature.

Chris Miller

SUPPLIER www.play.com

LOGITECH Harmony 885

★★★★★
£117 inc VAT



BEST BUY Logitech's Harmony 885 lets you replace your existing remote controls with one attractive handset. It's programmable through the provided software; you just enter the model numbers of your equipment. There are dedicated buttons for common controls such as volume and channel changing, but you can access more advanced controls using the colour screen and eight soft buttons. Even better, you can set up activities so that one button press will turn on all your equipment and map the controls. Watch a DVD, for example, assigns the volume controls to your AV receiver, picture controls to your TV, and menu keys to your DVD player.

With a recharge cradle that ensures you'll never run out of power, this is a brilliant tool for controlling your electrical kit.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.eclipsecomputers.com
DETAILS www.logitech.co.uk

GLADIATOR Centurion CSX1950P

★★★★★
£849 inc VAT

Gaming PCs are powerful beasts, ideal for playing the latest games and handling tough Windows tasks. Unfortunately, the roar of their fans can be distracting. Gladiator's Centurion CSX1950P isn't the quietest PC we've seen, but it's less noisy than most gaming PCs.

The Centurion has 2GB of RAM and an Intel Core 2 Duo E6300 processor. The computer's default settings overclock this from its standard 1.86GHz clock speed to 2.2GHz. It helped the PC power through our video-encoding benchmark, producing a score of 261, and made short work of our multitasking test.

This is the first PC we've seen to come with ATI's new Radeon X1950 Pro graphics card, which can play the latest games with ease. It sailed through our Doom 3 test at 66 frames per second (fps), and blitzed its way through our Call of Duty 2 test at 44.5fps. The Centurion's motherboard supports CrossFire, so you can add another X1950 Pro card for even quicker video performance. Unlike previous versions of the CrossFire technology, neither video adaptor needs to be a special master card, so it should be easier to choose and configure a second card. Another graphics card might infringe one of the three empty PCI slots or one of the two free PCI Express x1 slots, though.

The 320GB hard disk should provide enough room for plenty of games and documents, but if you find yourself running out of disk space, the computer's case has free drive bays for up to four additional hard disks. Adding and removing an internal hard disk is easy, since the disks are mounted inside a frame that can be completely removed from the rest of the PC. If you need even more



storage, you can add an external disk using the eSATA, FireWire 400 or USB2 ports.

Gigabit Ethernet connections have become widespread on desktop PCs, but the Centurion also has an integrated wireless networking adaptor. Though you'll get the fastest, most reliable data transfers over a wired connection, this gives you the option of connecting wirelessly to a suitable router.

This PC includes a small remote for controlling Windows Media Player. Although this makes browsing your videos and music convenient, it would be easier still if it had Windows XP Media Center Edition, rather than standard XP Home.

The Centurion is quick, and its easily removable hard disk frame and built-in wireless networking are convenient. However, it doesn't come with a keyboard, mouse, monitor or speakers, so it isn't good value. Mesh's Elite E6600 Express (see 'Also consider...') costs £200 more, but it comes with surround-sound speakers and a 19" LCD, and is an even quicker gaming computer.

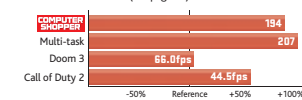
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good performance; quiet
- ✓ Easily upgradable
- ✗ Expensive

DESKTOP PC 2.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6300, 2GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB ATI Radeon X1950 Pro, DVD+/-RW +/-DL
SUPPLIER Gladiator 08456 444666
DETAILS www.gladiatorcomputers.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



Also consider...

MESH Elite E6600 Express

★★★★★
£1,049 inc VAT



Underneath the Elite's sturdy black and silver case is one of Intel's latest Core 2 Duo processors, the E6600, with a generous 2GB of RAM. This PC should handle most computing tasks without complaint for some time to come. While not as noisy as some PCs we've heard, the hum and whirring of the fans is intrusive in a quiet room.

Gamers will be pleased with the Elite's 256MB GeForce 7950GT graphics card, which breezed through our 3D graphics tests. This is the first Core 2 Duo PC we've seen with an SLI motherboard, so you can add a second Nvidia graphics card at a later date. The Sony 19" monitor



isn't ideal for photo editing, but its glossy finish makes colours look rich and bright.

Mesh's Elite E6600 Express is powerful in games and Windows. It's generously specified, a competent all-rounder and a good choice for a family PC.

DESKTOP PC 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6600, 2GB RAM, 300GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 7950GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, DVD-ROM, 19" LCD SUPPLIER Mesh Computers 08447 360440 DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com Fast in Windows and games; plenty of RAM No memory card reader FULL REVIEW Jan 2007

EVESHAM Mini PC Plus

★★★★

£840 inc VAT

Manufacturers sometimes have to compromise on power and features to squeeze an entire computer into a small, space-saving case. Evesham's Mini PC Plus comes in a lunchbox-sized chassis. It doesn't have any free drive bays or PCI slots, but it does contain a Core 2 Duo processor and a TV tuner.

This computer's Core 2 Duo T7200 processor is a mobile model, more usually found in notebook PCs. It still sped through our benchmarks, though, comfortably out-performing Pentium D systems and even matching the performance of some Core 2 Duo desktops we've reviewed. It was particularly impressive in our video-editing and multitasking tests.

The Mini PC Plus should handle most Windows tasks with ease, but it has an integrated Intel graphics processor, and isn't at all suitable for gaming. It couldn't even run our Doom 3 and Call of Duty 2 tests, though it can cope with some older, less-demanding titles. At least with no powerful graphics processor to cool, the Mini PC Plus is whisper-quiet.

If you find that you're in need of entertainment, you could amuse yourself with the built-in TV tuner. It's a hybrid device that can receive either analogue or digital broadcasts, though you won't be able to record one program while watching another. The Mini PC Plus comes with Windows XP Media Center Edition and a suitable remote control. The operating system's slick interface makes it easy to browse your music and photos, as well as recorded TV shows. You can use the computer's S-video and S/PDIF ports to connect it up your TV and a surround-sound amplifier.



With no PS/2 sockets, this computer can only use a USB keyboard and mouse, neither of which is included. Annoyingly, you'll need a USB hub to connect any other devices, as there are just two USB ports. At least you can use the FireWire port for connecting digital video cameras and compatible external storage devices, though.

The Mini PC Plus has a 100GB hard disk, which is a 2½" notebook model, and no spare drive bay. If you record a lot of TV programmes, or have lots of documents and photos, it's easier to buy an external disk than to open up the computer's case and upgrade the existing one. The computer's slot-loading DVD writer is also a notebook drive. It can't write DVD-R

DL discs, but it is DVD-RAM-compatible. The drive is quite slow, with a maximum write speed of 8X on single-layer DVDs. If you burn a lot of discs, you may want to buy a faster, external writer.

If you don't mind a bigger PC, Eclipse's Evolution I6300 (reviewed in *Labs*, *Shopper* December 2006) has a larger hard disk and is much more suitable for games. The Mini PC Plus is a fair choice if you need a tiny media PC that's powerful in Windows, but it isn't cheap, particularly as it doesn't come with a keyboard, mouse or monitor.

Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Small and quiet
- ✓ Powerful in Windows; TV tuner
- ✗ Expensive; no good for gaming

DESKTOP PC 2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7200, 1GB RAM, 100GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW DL, hybrid TV tuner
PART CODE MINIPCT3DEC06
SUPPLIER Evesham 08701 609500
DETAILS www.evesham.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)

COMPUTER BENCHMARK	158
Multi-task	157
Doom 3	Fail
Call of Duty 2	Fail

-50% Reference +50% +100%

MESH Viva 940 Pro

★★★★★

£799 inc VAT



Media centre PCs tend to be more expensive than standard computers, but Mesh's well-specified Viva 940 Pro PC costs just £799

including VAT. It's whisper-quiet, too, making it the perfect lounge companion. You can record one programme while watching another thanks to the two digital TV tuners. There are plenty of ports for connecting the Viva to your TV and stereo equipment.

The dual-core Pentium D processor and 2GB of RAM had no trouble playing back our high-definition Windows media files and breezed through our application benchmarks, so it's perfectly suitable as your main PC, too.

The integrated Intel graphics chip isn't suitable for playing the latest games and the half-height PCI



Express x16 slot limits your choice of graphics card upgrades, especially if you want it to remain silent. Nevertheless, Mesh's Viva 940 Pro is an affordable and well-specified media centre PC.

MEDIA CENTRE PC 3.2GHz Intel Pentium D 940, 2GB RAM, 300GB hard disk, Intel integrated graphics, two digital TV tuners, DVD+/-RW +/- DL
SUPPLIER Mesh Computers 08447 360440 DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com ✓ Twin digital TV tuners; powerful in Windows
✗ No good for games FULL REVIEW Dec 2006

BYTE SIZE

PARROT Driver Headset

★★★

£45 inc VAT



Parrot's Driver Headset is a Bluetooth phone headset designed for use in a car. It clicks neatly into its charging cradle, which plugs directly into a cigarette lighter socket. Once you've paired the headset with your Bluetooth phone, incoming calls ring out from the cradle's speaker and make the headset's LED flash. Undocking and docking the headset automatically answers or hangs up a call.

The Driver Headset sounds clear, but it's held in place only by a large earpiece that feels uncomfortable. Its charging cradle is well designed, but many cars supply power through their cigarette lighter only with the ignition on. No mains adaptor is supplied, so its price seems steep.

Simon Handby

SUPPLIER www.mobilefun.co.uk
DETAILS www.parrot.biz

BELKIN Wi-Fi Phone for Skype

★★★★

£99 inc VAT



This Belkin phone is nearly identical to the SMC Wi-Fi Phone for Skype, reviewed in *What's New*, *Shopper* January 2007. Both connect directly to a wireless network and allow you to make and receive Skype calls. You'll need a PC only when you want to buy features such as SkypeOut calls.

Belkin's phone is simple to use. Call quality was roughly the same as you'd get from a mobile phone, but you have to be careful not to stray too far from your wireless router. If you're out and about, you can use The Cloud hotspots, but you can't connect to hotspots that require browser authentication. It's great for making Skype calls from home, but not ideal on the road.

Simon Handby

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.belkin.com/uk

BYTE SIZE

CRUCIAL 1GB Gizmo! Overdrive

★★★★★
£20 inc VAT



USB flash drives tend to be much slower than hard disks, but Crucial claims that its 1GB Gizmo! Overdrive can write files at 13MB/s and read them at 25MB/s. We were pleasantly surprised that the Overdrive achieved these speeds when writing and reading large files in our speed tests. It wasn't as quick at reading small files, but at 10.65MB/s it is still faster than most. It seemed particularly slow only when writing small files, where it managed a speed of 0.37MB/s.

The Overdrive is faster than most other flash drives, but it doesn't cost much more than other 1GB disks. We reviewed the standard white model, but you can get a black version with encryption software for £25. Both are great value.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER Crucial 0800 013 0330
DETAILS www.crucial.com/uk

TREKSTOR USB-Stick CS-D

★★★
£90 inc VAT



Trekstor's 8GB USB-Stick contains a 1" hard disk. It's almost twice the width of a standard USB flash drive, so without the provided USB extension cable it could block off other USB ports. The USB connector's protective cap isn't attached to the drive, so it could be lost easily.

Although this drive's read and write performance for large files is in line with other USB sticks, small files were written at just 0.2MB/s in our tests. Western Digital's 6GB Passport has a lower capacity, but it's quicker and has a lower cost per gigabyte. Its swivelling USB port means you won't need to carry an extension cable around with you to avoid blocking other USB ports, so it's a better choice.

Alan Lu

SUPPLIER www.aria.co.uk
DETAILS www.trekstore.de/en

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR Intel Pentium D 820
MEMORY 1GB
HARD DISK 250GB
STORAGE 16x DVD writer
SOUND Integrated
SPEAKERS Stereo
GRAPHICS Integrated
MONITOR 19" LCD
EXTRAS 56K modem
CONNECTORS 4x USB2, network
SOFTWARE Windows XP Home Edition
BASICS Keyboard, mouse
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £500 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a no-no.

2 The size and shape of a PC is more important than it used to be. A mini PC costs a bit more and it's less upgradable, but it will take up less desk space and look much more attractive. If you're choosing a media centre PC, make sure you get one that fits in with any other electronic equipment in your living room and that it's quiet.

3 Interested in games? Upgrade to a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the GeForce 7300 GT graphics processor or Radeon X1600 will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today), you'll want anything up to a GeForce 7950 GX2 or Radeon X1900XTX.

Look for an SLI or CrossFire system if you want to use two graphics cards to get the best graphics performance. Even if you don't want SLI or CrossFire now, it may be worth getting a system that's capable of being upgraded later.

4 The processor above is powerful and it's dual core, so it will handle intensive tasks. If you're going to be doing a lot of video editing, you should consider upgrading to an even more powerful processor. Intel's Core 2 Duo range is our current top choice; as well as being more powerful, it needs less cooling so your PC should be quieter.

5 If you're not interested in games, you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor. If you'll be using your PC for serious desktop publishing, music or photo-editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of PC activities. To hear the surround

soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you. If you're not interested in games or DVDs (or you don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you're interested in music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 A 17" LCD is standard but not very exciting and quite small. A 19" LCD costs around £50 more and has the same resolution (1,280x1,024) but is easier on the eye. Twenty-inch LCDs are available from £300 and have a higher resolution (1,600x1,200). These are better for those who want to edit large photos, documents or spreadsheets, run two applications side by side, or just look important.

If you're more interested in entertainment, consider a widescreen monitor. As well as being ideally suited for watching movies, they give you more room horizontally, so you can work on two documents side by side.

Decide if you want a glossy display or not. Glossy displays improve contrast and make images look brighter, but they reflect overhead lights and sunlight easily, making them hard to work with.

8 The standard set of connectors can be improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras. Look for a memory card reader if you have a digital camera and make sure your camera's memory card is supported.

9 Windows XP Home Edition is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never use it. But you may happen across a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for; you'll save lots of money by having it preloaded, although you won't get technical support included.

10 If you have money left over, consider a TV card. This lets you watch TV on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, or capture analogue video from a camcorder.

